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TAGS: IZ PGOV KDEM
SUBJECT: KRG ELECTIONS: A "REAL RACE" IN SULAIMANIYAH?

REF: A. BAGHDAD 1486
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Classified By: Deputy Political Counselor Steve Walker for reason 1.4 (d).

¶1. (C) Summary: Two recent polls conducted in the Kurdistan region project that the Kurdistan Coalition -- formed by the Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP) and the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK) -- and current KRG President Masoud Barzani are early favorites in the elections to be held on July 25 (Ref A). However, analysis from the International Republican Institute (IRI), a DRL-grantee, indicates that small parties may attract significant, if still minority, support on election day, especially in Sulaimaniyah. Both the Change List, led by PUK exile Nawshirwan Mustafa, and the "Four Parties List" (comprised of religious and leftist parties) are beginning to attract politically significant support in the KRG elections. However, polling results are very limited, and more polls are needed to get a clearer analysis of what is to come. End Summary.

The Hawlati Newspaper Poll

¶2. (C) On June 6, the "Hawlati" newspaper in Erbil published results of a poll conducted by the Kurdistan Student Solidarity Organization (Note: this organization receives some support from PUK but is considered credible). The organization reports receiving 3,104 responses to the 3,450 forms that were distributed; apparently the poll only covers Erbil and Sulaimaniyah. The poll projects that the KDP/PUK coalition will win 32.7% of the votes and that Nawshirwan Mustafa's Change List will win 29.5%. The development list has 14.2% of the results, and the Reform and Services List (also known as the Four Party List) 13.8%. The results show current KRG president Masoud Barzani winning the popular vote for KRG president with 41.3% of the vote. He is followed by Dr. Halil Ibrahim Ahmed Fatah (the brother of President Talabani's wife) at 34.7%; Dr. Kamal Mamand Rasul Mirawdal with 16.8%; Hussein Garmiyani with 2.8% and Safeen Sheikh Muhammed with 2%. Ahmed Kurda, who has withdrawn from the race, won 2.2% of the poll's votes. Embassy Baghdad obtained a copy of the poll, which notes at the bottom, "This polling was not implemented in Duhok Gov. because our staff (was) obstructed there and we could not do it."

IRI Touts a Third-Party Poll

¶3. (C) On June 8, IRI Chief of Party Rob Varsalone shared with Poloffs another poll done for the KDP by an American polling expert and shared with IRI in confidence (Note: Varsalone trusts the results of this poll more than the Hawlati poll. It was shared with him in strict confidence and we pledged to safeguard the information and his role in giving it to us. End note). According to the poll, overall

expectations for the July 25 KRG elections show the Kurdistan Coalition (composed of KDP/PUK) receiving 78% of the votes; the Change List receiving 12% of the vote; and the Four Parties coalition receiving 9% of the vote. The poll also breaks down results by each of the three KRG governorates. For Erbil, the KDP/PUK is expected to win 71% of the vote; the Four Parties 10%; and the Change List 3%. Varsalone notes that the higher level of support for the Four Parties list in Erbil is due to their successful campaign of anti-corruption and Islam. In Dahuk, the poll puts KDP/PUK at 79% of the votes, with Change List at 7% and Four Parties at 3%.

¶4. (C) But, according to Varsalone, a "real race" may be shaping up in Sulaimaniyah. The KDP poll that he shared with Emboffs shows that KDP/PUK winning 38% of the vote, QEmboffs shows that KDP/PUK winning 38% of the vote, Nawshirwan's Change List garnering 21% and the Four Parties 12%. This is much lower than general opinion or other polls have shown (Ref B). According to IRI, Nawshirwan seems to be polling well because his anti-corruption platform is popular, but he will still depend on high voter turnout to translate his popular message into gains on election day. As the race heats up, Poloffs and RRToffs are hearing concerns from their contacts that the period before the elections could become more tense in Sulaimaniyah, including a risk of increased violence. (Note: In terms of the overall DRL-grantee assistance to the KRG elections, IRI has been specifically tasked to work with small and emerging parties. For this reason, IRI is well suited to analyzing trends among these parties. End Note.)

Comment

¶5. (C) The data provided by these polls are far from a complete analysis of the political shifts expected in the Kurdistan Region on July 25, and we are unable to assess their accuracy with precision. That said, they are valuable as one early assessment of the electoral race. There are limited options for polling in the KRG, and due to the heavy KDP/PUK influences, it is hard to get a clear assessment of voter expectations based on polls. Both IRI and the National Democratic Institute (another DRL grantee) are conducting polling in the KRG, the results of which will be shared with the Embassy and directly with political parties to assist their efforts to develop strategies and messages. End Comment.

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